

Washington University in St. Louis
Washington University Open Scholarship

Graduate School of Art Theses

Graduate School of Art

Spring 5-18-2018

It's pink and nice but we are done with it

Taylor Elizabeth Yocom

Washington University in St. Louis, taylor.yocom@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/samfox_art_etds



Part of the [Fine Arts Commons](#), [Interdisciplinary Arts and Media Commons](#), [Other Film and Media Studies Commons](#), and the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Yocom, Taylor Elizabeth, "It's pink and nice but we are done with it" (2018). *Graduate School of Art Theses*. ETD 110. <https://doi.org/10.7936/K7C53K9K>.

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School of Art at Washington University Open Scholarship. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate School of Art Theses by an authorized administrator of Washington University Open Scholarship. For more information, please contact digital@wumail.wustl.edu.

Washington University in St. Louis
Graduate School of Art

It's pink and nice but we are done with it

Taylor Yocom

A thesis presented to the Sam Fox School of Design and Visual Arts
of Washington University in St. Louis in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts

Graduate Committee
Monika Weiss | Thesis Advisor
Heather Bennett | Studio Advisor
Patricia Olynyk | Studio Advisor
Lisa Bulawsky | Committee Member
Linda Nicholson | Committee Member

ABSTRACT	1
INTRODUCTION	2
GIRLS ARE SUPPOSED TO BE NICE, RIGHT?	3
But I might be wrong, right?	7
Niceness is bodily	10
We must be nice	12
IT'S SO PINK AND NICE, RIGHT?	15
It's about something that usually doesn't matter too much	19
PERFORMING THE PERFORMANCE	22
For the nice girls in the shows by bad men	26
CONCLUSION	42
ENDNOTES:	43
BIBLIOGRAPHY	46
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS:	48
PLATES:	67

Abstract

My work in video, installation, performance, sound, and photography is influenced and inspired by my experience of being a woman. In my work, I draw pink flowers and create pink backdrops. I smash things, eat, drink, drop things, smile, nod, and look at you. Through these works, I explore the gender performativity of female niceness, synthesizing these two separate theories as a social condition and expectation for women. I argue that female niceness consists of bodily and linguistic patterns that women must perform in order to be perceived as feminine.

In my video and installation work, I use a “sickeningly” sweet aesthetic to speak to this social phenomenon using the language that has been thrown upon women: flowers, patterns, and an overload of pink. Diver deeper into the cultural mythology of the color, my work connotes the negative associations with pink. My work battles with these assumptions, showing that the color is analogous with not taking women’s concerns seriously.

My moving images and installations demonstrate tension in response to this dynamic through uncomfortable moments in pink. In one video, I try to smash a pink harmonica with a milkshake glass, it never breaks. In another, the pink shot glass bounces and never shatters. Inspired by the films and TV shows made by men exposed or discussed during the #metoo movement as a cultural focal point, I demonstrate the pervasiveness of the expectation of female niceness – and how this expectation is linked to harassment and other gendered injustices. Despite anger and frustration, this culture cannot change as a result of women’s anger alone. Thus, my work as an artist is predicated on this dilemma.

Introduction

My work in video, installation, performance, sound, and photography is influenced and inspired by my experience of being a woman. In my work, I draw pink flowers and create pink backdrops. I smash things, eat, drink, drop things, smile, nod, and look at you.

To me, femininity is intertwined with not being taken seriously, underestimation, the constant expectation to apologize, and the idea of fitting into a set of expectations. This text will talk about femininity from my viewpoint as an artist who is tainted by its idea as it is portrayed in the American media. I grew up in the era of princesses and pink, yet, I remain conflicted about my feminine identity and my work confronts you with that unresolved question.

I look to Coco Fusco's 2006 performance *A Room of One's Own: Women and Power in The New America*. She confronts the viewers – from a podium, donning a military uniform – with an unwavering gaze and assertive voice. Acting as a military interrogator, she tells the audience how the war on terror has created opportunities for women.¹ The audience laughs. The piece is subversive – but I wonder if she'd receive the same laughter if she was speaking in earnest.

In this text, I will explore niceness as it informs my work. I will try to be nice, I will try to not be nice. I will ultimately explore the gender performativity of female niceness and how this relates to contemporary society. I will speak from a place of research and theory – I will also speak from a place of personal narrative. Niceness is a performance – and within this text I will speak with authority and with my authentic voice as an artist.

Girls are supposed to be nice, right?

I am interested in the performativity of gender. In Judith Butler's chapter "Bodily Inscriptions, Performative Subversions" in her 1990 book *Gender Trouble* she states "in other words, acts and gestures, articulated and enacted desires create the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core."ⁱⁱ Actions are legitimized through repeat performance, as she writes.

In what senses, then, is gender an act? As in other ritual social dramas, the action of gender requires a performance that is *repeated*. This repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation...Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*.ⁱⁱⁱ

Some actions and behaviors are seen as feminine, some are masculine. I look to the pink in my studio. I look to the actions in TV shows and movies that fall on different sides of the gendered divide. Women are expected to be nice – and I'm bothered by this mandate. My installation, *Just hold it out for prom* is a series of six hand sewn pillows with embroidered text *[figures 1 and 2]*. In September 2016, I cut up the prom dress that had been sitting in my closet for almost a decade. From the scraps, I made pillows. On the pillows, I embroidered found text from fights with my high school boyfriend. The ones when I was apologizing. The ones when I told him it was my fault. The project references the young and the naïve but I saw something larger.

I feel I must be nice – pleasant and agreeable. It is a reflex. I think of how "nice girls" should act. I equate being nice with making others happy. I make work about this expectation. "It's about how women are expected to apologize for everything, you know?" I tell visitors to my studio.

They understood. I recognized something, but it didn't have a name to it yet. Harriet Lerner indeed, does have a name to this phenomenon. She discusses the "nice lady syndrome" in her 1985 book *The Dance of Anger*:

If we are the "nice ladies," how do we behave? In situations that might realistically evoke anger or protest, we stay silent, or become tearful, self-critical, or 'hurt.' If we do feel angry, we keep it to ourselves in order to avoid the possibility of open conflict. But it is not just our anger that we keep to ourselves, in addition we may avoid making clear statements about what we think and feel, when we suspect that such clarity would make another person uncomfortable and expose differences between us.^{iv}

Niceness is about being agreeable and pleasant – even in situations that make us want to scream. I make work about the gender performativity of female niceness. I conflate the performance of gender with the work as performance. Being "nice" consists of actions and speech patterns that indicate niceness – and I argue that women's niceness is a type of gender performance.

Laurie Rudman and Peter Glick discuss female niceness in a 1999 study, "Feminized Management and Backlash toward Agentic Women." They equate niceness with traits that maintain women's subordination: "communal traits such as concern for others, emotional expressiveness, and cooperativeness."^v I will expand on these traits to define female niceness as repeated linguistic and bodily traits. Rudman and Glick later conducted a study on how women in the workplace were perceived if they did not adhere to feminine niceness. The abstract concludes with:

The findings suggest that the prescription for female niceness is an implicit belief that penalizes women unless they temper their agency with niceness.^{vi}

“Temper” implies changing behavior or emotion. The word sticks out as a modifier: to change, to calm down. Temper. “To lessen the force or effect of something.”^{vii} To make it not as big of a deal as it should be. When one loses their temper, they blow it. They lose their control.

Tempering is stopping this blow up before it starts. Women aren’t allowed to have a temper.

Arlie Hochschild, who coined the term “emotional labor” elaborates on her definition of emotion work in her 1979 essay “Emotion Work, Feeling Rules, and Social Structure”:

“Emotion work” refers more broadly to the act of evoking or shaping, as well as suppressing feeling in oneself. I avoid the term "manipulate" because it suggests a shallowness I do not mean to imply. We can speak, then, of two broad types of emotion work: evocation, in which the cognitive focus is on a desired feeling which is initially absent, and suppression in which the cognitive focus is on an undesired feeling which is initially present.^{viii}

To “temper one’s agency with niceness” is to do the “emotion work” of presenting different emotions than one feels – evocation. “Tempering one’s agency with niceness” also implies a suppression of negative emotion: one would smile instead of scream. Thus, performing female niceness encompasses both forms of emotion work that Hochschild presents. In my work, I demonstrate that female niceness is characterized through body language, speech patterns, and mannerisms – all falling under the umbrella of Harriet Lerner’s previously mentioned categorization of women as “the nurturers, the soothers, the peacemakers, and the steadiers of rocked boats...to please, protect, and placate the world.”



In my 12-minute video installation with sound titled *nice* [figure 3], I perform female niceness by staging myself in a pink room drinking the (recreated) drinks that men bought me in the past. A five-dollar gin and tonic at a dive bar. A can of shitty beer from a house show. *Great taste, huh?* I remember when that guy in college bought me a gin and tonic and then grabbed my ass in front of my friends. I remember the guy who bought me the shitty beer wouldn't stop being condescending about my musical tastes. I just put up with it.

The installation is dotted with flowers and covered with different shades of pink. The music is repetitive and seems not out of place in a jazz bar. The set-up is traditionally feminine. In this performance, I twirl my hair and smile and nod. The menu with the drink's price and the conversational tone (listening to their unending lecture on music and the like) contextualizes the situation. Yet, I never say a word. Lerner continues in *The Dance of Anger*:

Women, however, have long been discouraged from awareness and forthright expression of anger. Sugar and spice are the ingredients of which we are made. We are the nurturers, the soothers, the peacemakers, and the steadiers of rocked boats. It is our job to please, protect and placate the world.^{ix}

I drink the drink, I smile. I look uncomfortable – the music stops. The drink is finished. The camera pans back to reveal the pink room is actually two pieces of paper tacked to the wall – a backdrop for a performance. I look around the room, I look at the camera, I look away. The niceness is a performance and it has run its course. The artifice of pleasant and happy femininity is revealed.

But I might be wrong, right?

I'm working as a barista. I overhear a customer make a complicated order and my two coworkers are talking about how to make it. I chime in with "that's just like a London fog, right?" It was just like a London fog. I knew it was, and I was right. I don't know why I acted so unsure about what I was saying.

Linguist Robin Lakoff calls these speech patterns *tag questions* in her 1972 book *Language and Woman's Place*:

One makes a statement when one has confidence in his knowledge and is pretty certain that his statement will be believed; one asks a question when one lacks knowledge on some point and has reason to believe that this gap can and will be remedied by an answer by the addressee. A tag question, being intermediate between these, is used when the speaker is stating a claim, but lacks full confidence in the truth of that claim.^x

I made a tag question, possessing low self-confidence when it was not necessary. This was a reaction. I felt that I would not be well received if I was assertive. Tag questions are a way for the speaker to appear nonassertive. Women are especially conditioned to possess this trait, as Lakoff continues in the next chapter:

...the tag appears anyway as an apology for making an assertion at all. Anyone may do this if he lacks self-confidence, as anyone does in some situations, but my impression is that women do it more, precisely because they are socialized to believe that asserting themselves strongly isn't nice or ladylike, or even feminine.^{xi}

Niceness is agreeableness – and this is manifested through a learned low self confidence in assertions. The prescription for niceness equates being knowledgeable as threatening – *not nice*. This tension is demonstrated within the questions themselves. The assertion fades as the question is finished, the assertion is squashed as a reflex.

I am senior in college. I am waiting for the bus. My headphones are in – I am listening to music. A man I have never met comes up next to me. He starts talking about his favorite Quentin Tarentino movies. I have never seen them – I have nothing to add. And I would rather be listening to the song I’ve been wanting to hear all day. I say “uh huh.” I say “no way.” I provide the niceties of conversation while letting him talk on and on. He never asks a question about me.

The niceness found within speech patterns extends to conversational banter. Pamela Fishman’s 1978 study of tape recorded conversations between men and women, “Interaction,” looked at the gender breakdown of conversational work. Women typically provided the niceties that indicated they were listening and kept the conversation going, as she elaborates.

The women also made this type of minimal response at times. but their most frequent use of the minimal response was as “support work.” Throughout the tapes. when the men are talking. the women are particularly skilled at inserting ‘mm’s.’ ‘yeah’s.’ ‘oh’s.’ and other such comments throughout streams of talk rather than at the end. These are signs from the inserter that she is constantly attending to what is said, that she is demonstrating her participation. Her interest in the interaction and the speaker. How well the women do this is also striking- seldom do they mistime their insertions and cause even slight overlaps. These minimal responses occur between the breaths of a speaker, and there is nothing in tone or structure to suggest they are attempting to take over the talk.^{xii}

Women are the conversational cheerleaders. These phrases: “uh huh,” “tell me more,” “no way,” that confirm that the listener is indeed listening are called backchanneling. Multiple American studies found that women provide more backchanneling than men do.^{xiii} Fishman concludes her study with this finding:

There is an unequal distribution of work in conversation. We can see from the

differential use of strategies that the women are more actively engaged in insuring interaction than the men. They ask more questions and use attention beginnings. Women do support work while the men are talking and generally do active maintenance and continuation work in conversations. The men, on the other hand, do much less active work when they begin or participate in interactions. They rely on statements, which they assume will get responses, when they want interaction. Men much more often discourage interactions initiated by women than vice-versa.^{xiv}

Women are discouraged from speaking up – pushed aside to listen but also keep the conversation going. Niceness takes form as agreeability and cheerleading, only leaving room for women to smile and provide affirmations. To be the ones saying “uh huh” and not the ones saying “I have something to add.”



Niceness is bodily

It is spring 2016. I am on the last leg of three connecting flights to Alaska. It is midnight. The plane is quiet. I'm trying to sleep. I am next to a man whose legs are spread out – a classic manspreader. My legs are crossed. My arms are in my lap. This is normal to me. I'm sure it's normal to him, too. Women exhibit niceness through their body language. Women carry themselves to take up less space – as opposed to men. Iris Young writes in her 1980 essay, “Throwing Like a Girl”:

Even in the most simple body orientations of men and women as they sit, stand, and walk, one can observe a typical difference in body style and extension. Women generally are not as open with their bodies as are men in their gait and stride. Typically, the masculine stride is longer proportional to a man's body than is the feminine stride to a woman's. The man typically swings his arm in a more open and loose fashion than does a woman and typically has more up and own rhythm in his step.^{xv}

Women keep their body more compact than men do. This could have to do with a myriad of reasons – yet the underlying question of niceness lingers. In the case of manspreading, women are conditioned to be courteous: to cross their legs. Men spread out, conquering it all. This observation posits that being out of the way is nice.

I'm ringing up orders at the coffee shop. The line is crawling towards the door. I ask a man if he'd like anything else as I punch in his total. “You,” he says. What he says registers as I awkwardly smile and laugh and try to keep a cheerful demeanor for the rest of the customers. Smiling is practically synonymous with niceness. This expectation extends past gender and

socioeconomic lines, but women still face the brunt of this mandate. Sandra Bartky explains how women are socialized to show this gesture in her 1970s essay, “Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power.”:

Women are trained to smile more than men, too. In the economy of smiles, as elsewhere, there is evidence that women are exploited, for they give more than they receive in return; in a smile elicitation study, one researcher found that the rate of smile return by women was 93 percent, by men only 67 percent (Henley 1977, 176). In many typical women’s jobs, graciousness, deference, and readiness to serve are part of the work; this requires the worker to fix a smile on her face for a good part of the working day, whatever her inner state (Hochschild, 1983).^{xvi}

I wonder how many of those returns on smiles were with gritted teeth? Linking back to Hochschild’s research, this “economy of smiles” leaves room that women perform these smiles as a part of “emotion work.” Smiling is an important aspect of feminine body language. Dara Birnbaum’s 1979 video piece, *Kiss the Girls: Make Them Cry*, hones in on stereotypical gestures of men and women in a 1970s game show. The women look off to the side in self-doubt. Some laugh. They smile and nod. The men look confident, almost cocky. Their chests are puffed out. They sit tall.

Niceness demands a pleasant demeanor. Like Dr. Lerner said, “it is our job to please, protect, and placate the world.”^{xvii} And, of course, a pleasant demeanor begins with a smile.

We must be nice

An important caveat to my argument is that the opposite of women performing niceness is not a world devoid of social niceties. “Niceness is a necessary and important lubricant to any social exchange and men make themselves nice, too. It keeps the social wheels turning,” asserts Arlie Hochschild.^{xviii} A world without female niceness is not a world without this social lubricant, rather, this world would give women the freedom to decide when they perform niceness.

The pressures to perform female niceness creates a double bind that keeps women behind. Women feel pressured to be nice – yet face consequences regardless of if they subscribe to this prescription. Rudman and Glick found that men were rejected for not seeming competent while women were rejected for not being nice. Social role theory punishes people for not performing under the umbrella of their gendered social script.^{xix}

The stereotypes for performing gender roles is compounded by the narrow confines of femininity. Lerner explains the reactions to the women who don’t abide by rules of niceness:

The direct expression of anger, especially at men, makes us unladylike, unfeminine, unmaternal, sexually unattractive, or more recently, “strident.” Even our language condemns such women as “shrews,” “witches,” “bitches,” “hags,” “nags,” “man-haters,” and “castrators.” They are unloving and unlovable. They are devoid of femininity.^{xx}

To show anger disqualifies one from appearing feminine. The actions of niceness must be continually performed to maintain the illusion of gender under Butler’s theory. Those who do not perform niceness are disqualified on the basis of their actions not aligning with the gendered

script – not what they are articulating. And those who do prescribe to the dictates of niceness?

Rudman and Glick find that they still face setbacks.

The implicit prescription that women ought to be nicer than men may be a particularly insidious and important force in maintaining inequality between the sexes. Remember that the prescription for communality is reinforced by women's lower status in society. Yet because communal traits are evaluated favorably, those who are subordinated (women) are equally happy as those who are dominant (men) to embrace the stereotypical prescription that women should be nice (cf. Eagly & Mladinic, 1989; Jost & Banaji, 1994; Rudman, 1998). Women's niceness has direct effects that maintain subordination, such as the tendency to defer to men in interaction (Lakoff, 1990; Ridgeway & Erickson, 2000), and the tendency to choose occupations that are less likely to lend women status, resources, and power (Pratto, Stallworth, Sidanius, & Siers, 1997).^{xxi}

The mandate to perform female niceness is a trap to keep women behind. When women must perform niceness – must *be* nice – they are met with a double bind. What about those women in history who dared to act outside of this social script? I find an answer in Kate Zambreno's 2012 book *Heroines*:

In 1970, at a meeting before the American Psychological Association, a mostly male audience of psychologists, feminist psychologist Phyllis Chesler asked for one million dollars in reparations for women who had been “punitively labeled, overly tranquilized, sexually seduced while in treatment, hospitalized against their wills, given shock therapy, lobotomized, and above all, unnecessarily described as too aggressive, promiscuous, depressed, ugly, old, fat, or incurable.” The audience sat there in silence. Maybe they thought it was a joke.^{xxii}

The social mandate to subscribe to these gender roles is not as simple as pointing the finger to one source. Sandra Bartky theorizes the mandate for femininity. The social context of femininity – and feminine bodies – has created a system in which there is no overt authority, yet women still subscribe to these ideals.

Feminine bodily discipline has this dual character: on the one hand, no one is marched off for electrolysis at gunpoint, nor can we fail to appreciate the initiative and ingenuity displayed by countless women in an attempt to master the rituals of beauty. Nevertheless, insofar as the disciplinary practices of femininity produce a 'subjected and practiced,' an inferiorized, body, they must be understood as aspects of a far larger discipline, an oppressive and inegalitarian system of sexual subordination. This system aims at turning women into the docile and compliant companions of men just as surely as the army aims to turn its raw recruits into soldiers.^{xxiii}

Bartky's analysis on feminine bodies – beauty rituals – can be extrapolated to apply to niceness.

There is no niceness police that arrests women for not being nice. Yet, when Bartky's argument is viewed in the context of the other research on niceness I have presented, her point is damning.

The expectation to be nice turns women into "nice" women: this leave little room for women to express anger, assertiveness, or aggression without backlash.

I assert this analysis on niceness coupled with Butler's theory on gender performativity posits that in order for women to be seen as feminine, they must continually exhibit traits of female niceness. This performance constitutes the illusion of gender. Thus, the expectations of femininity are rigid. Just as women start an assertion and end it with a question, they must police themselves, too.



It's so pink and nice, right?

Over the course of 2017, my work has become more and more pink. There is a 2 foot by 6-foot panel with pink wallpaper in my studio that is part of my sculpture titled “*she’s so nice, isn’t she?*” [figure 4] The viewer is invited to pick up a pink phone and a recording of me saying “no worries!” on loop. *Pick me up*. During open studio events, the color is usually the first comment visitors make. They either love it or hate it. Mothers have to drag their young daughters out of my space. I recognize the color is polarizing and loaded with connotations. This is my visual language: I am trying to parse out my personal history with the color alongside the societal context.

I am away at college, sophomore year. My grandma is in hospice, dying. My mom texted me a picture of her hands clutching the tube of bright pink lipstick she never left the house without.

Pink lipstick – ultimate femininity. She knew how to walk the line. She would tell you how wonderful you were yet could also cuss out the guy that backed into her in a parking lot (I was nine and learned a few words that day). She almost had her Ph.D. and retired as a high school teacher. I grew up with her as the grandma who wore brightly colored skirt suits and a gem-encrusted brooch in the shape of a jaguar. My mom had to point out “grandma type” women in public so my sister and I would know who to go to if we ever got lost – so we knew what one looked like.

In the 2011 book *Cinderella Ate My Daughter: Dispatches from the Front Lines of the New Girlie-Girl Culture*, Peggy Oreinstein reports on pink and princesses. She uses the pages to

disparage the color pink and the “girlie-girl” culture thrown onto young girls. There is a passage in which she spirals into an anxiety of hypotheticals regarding her disgust at her daughter’s love of Cinderella. She wonders if her daughter “had been thinking ‘mommy doesn’t want me to be a girl?’”^{xxiv} There is a pushback to pink because of the associations with stereotypical femininity. This begs the question: what is inherently wrong about stereotypical femininity?

The story of my grandmother finding power with her pink lipstick is ironic given the cultural mythology surrounding the color. Pink has been used as a strategic color to temper aggression. Oliver Genschow et al describe the history of the choice in the introduction to their 2015 study, “Does Baker-Miller pink reduce aggression in prison detention cells? A critical empirical examination.”

In 1979, Schauss (see also, Pellegrini, Schauss, & Miller, 1981) reported that prison inmates calmed down more strongly when they were incarcerated in cells painted in so- called Baker-Miller pink compared to white cells. Baker-Miller pink is a color named for two US Naval officers who first investigated the influence of that specific color. Baker- Miller pink was originally produced by mixing one pint of outdoor semi-gloss red trim paint and one gallon of pure white indoor latex paint (cf. Schauss, 1979). Presumably, the visual processing of the Baker-Miller pink affects neurological and endocrine functions, which in turn reduce physical strength, and thus aggressive behavior (cf. Ott, 1979; Pellegrini, Schauss, & Miller, 1981). Based on this reasoning many prisons across Western countries (for an overview see Table 1) recently began to paint detention and prison cells in Baker-Miller pink to calm down aggressive inmates. In Switzerland, for example, almost every fifth prison or police station has now at least one pink detention cell. But does it really work?^{xxv}

Their findings concluded that the results of the original studies could not be replicated. Even if the painted prison walls do not physically work in the way the Schauss reported, the color has demoralizing effects. In a 2013 *Daily Mirror* article titled “Jails painted PINK to calm inmates

but prisoners complain they are humiliated,” prison reform campaigner David Zimmer said
“[inmates] say it is humiliating to be confined to a room painted like a little girl’s bedroom.”^{xxvi}

Feeling like a little girl. Vulnerability. Weakness. Humiliation. Little girls aren’t supposed to stand up and speak their mind.

Dutch artist Lily van der Stokker creates large scale pink installations, but her work functions in a much different way than the jail cells. In a review of her show *Huh* [figure 5] at Koenig and Clinton Gallery in 2014, the author describes the sculptures and wall paintings as “Pepto-Bismol pink.”^{xxvii} The boxy sculptures stand like firm islands, towering over the viewer. *Huh*. I cannot tell if the tone is meant to be sarcastic or genuinely confused. The lack of punctuation leaves a lot to the imagination.

Sometimes I feign confusion because it’s easier than asserting myself.

But I imagine myself in this gallery, looking up at a giant pink box. I think it would make me feel small. I wonder if that is what she wants?

The exhibition catalogue, titled *It doesn’t mean anything but it looks good* accompanying her show at Tate St. Ives features large scale wall paintings. I immediately identify yet am repulsed by the title. Just like the ambiguity of *Huh*, I wonder if this is ironic. I am trying to make things that look good and mean something. What about her?

The catalogue features sketches for wall paintings. One pink drawing has the word “nothing” in bubble letters [figure 6]. There is a drawing of pink patterned chairs in front of a pink wall with the same pattern. “I think it’s 9 o’clock” is in the bottom left corner. “but I could be wrong,” is in the right corner, completing the phrase [figure 7]. The work is fun and bright and colorful. There is a tinge of doubt if you look closely.

In an interview with van der Stokker and John Waters in the catalogue she insists that her work isn’t ironic. She loves “the decorative – the flowers, the curls and the nothingness.”

One exchange stands out:

JW: Your works are aggressive too, no?

LvdS: You as a viewer could get angry because you are afraid of what you see. You could say I’m aggressive in a way that I like to enlarge female clichés, like the decorative and bad taste pink. I’m not afraid of that.^{xxviii}

The prisoners felt humiliated – like little girls – for being in pink cells. Yet van der Stokker concedes that her works could be aggressive. That someone could be afraid of it. The prisoners were humiliated by pink. The fear comes from being infantilized.

But pink is fun and patterns are whimsical. Isn’t it strange how patterns are dismissed as frivolous – flowers lined up – yet formations of anything else are seen as strong and intimidating?

Flowers are lined up in unison in my backdrops and panel works, but so are soldiers. So are buildings. So are big box displays. The symbols of strength stand tall the same way my flowers

do. But because they have strong associations with femininity, they lose the qualifications before they're even in the race. They're seen as annoying and frivolous.

But in my work, you can't ignore the pink. The flowers stand tall in front of you. Maybe that's where the paradox lies? Perhaps this is my fascination with my grandma's brand of femininity. She was part of the tradition of pink but you couldn't look away. I keep thinking of my grandma and her heels. How she was in pain on one of the most important nights of her life. So she broke the structure and tried to find her balance.

What was she going to do instead, go barefoot?

Pink is bright. Flowers stand strong. We can use the language we have been given to scream from the rooftops. We can talk about how messed up what we have to put up with is within the language we've been given.



It's about something that usually doesn't matter too much

It is January 2018. I am in New York visiting the Laura Owens retrospective at The Whitney. I am here because I embrace the feminine in my work. And I am loving it. There is a painting of a unicorn [figure 6] There is a painting of cats [figure 7]. Pink and purple is everywhere. These icons that are traditionally confined to little girls' bedrooms are in a landmark cultural institution.

A headline from Artsy.net reads “In Laura Owens’s New Whitney Show, Painting is Seriously Fun.”^{xxix} This “frivolity” is taken seriously.

I am on the eighth floor. There is one large piece here – a collection of five freestanding panels with text that runs off of the surface. I see the word cat. I see the word alien. Those are fun, whimsical words. The backs of the panels boast large drawings of fruit. Fun, whimsical piece. I look around – people are moving their bodies to be aligned with how the piece should be read. I do the same. It’s this funny dance we’re all doing. It’s in silence. It’s like everyone’s going through their own mental gymnastics and not letting anyone else in on their secret even though there is no winner here.

I think I finally figure it out. I find the angle of the piece which reads “there was a cat and an alien. They went to Antarctica. Then they teleported to the center of the earth. There they got 11,0000000 bombs and blew them up and turned earth.”

The sentence cuts off. I move around again, trying to find the rest of the story. I cannot. Owens brings you in with innocence and slaps you over the head with the unexpected. Cats and then bombs. I think of the mixture of disdain and dismissal associated with these icons of femininity: the little girl’s bedroom is not taken seriously. She is “seriously fun” with her works – it gives her a pass to sneak in the subversive.

I realize that the strategy she employs is what I want to try to get at, too. I want to use pink and flowers and this traditionally tame aesthetic to talk about something larger, darker, deeper, than what the language is traditionally used for.



Performing the performance

My work is performative in subtle ways – it’s not a shocking show, but the movements live in quiet moments. I perform real events – or events that are plausibly real. Simulacrum – “an insubstantial form or semblance of something.”^{xxx} I draw inspiration from my memory, from what I see on a screen, and use those actions as inspiration for recreation. It’s not real, but not unreal.

In my video work titled *Conversation Captivity!* [figure 10] I am trying to read, but am interrupted. I look at the camera. “Blah blah blah” – my voice – is playing on a loop. The footage is spliced with colorful text blocks [figure 11] sarcastically exclaiming “no way!” I remember that time I was sitting outside, reading, and a man stood above me and would not stop talking. I wanted to tell him to stop. I wanted to get up and walk away. But I didn’t know what he was capable of doing if I appeared annoyed. Would it be worth the risk?

Blah blah blah

No way!

Blah blah blah

Tell me more!^{xxxi}

It is December 2016. I am showing the *Conversation Captivity* to visitors in my studio. They laugh. They call the piece a performance. I thought I was just acting like how I normally do. I feel uncomfortable yet at home with this new label.

Performance, defined as “the manner of reacting to stimuli.”^{xxxii} Performance is reactionary. I thought I was not doing anything – the filming consisted of eating the lunch I packed for the day and looking at the camera. But I was performing in that video. I think back on all of my videos. They are performances in reaction to specific moments – they’re not organic.

They’re reactionary.



It is a year later – Fall 2017. I think of the time I dated a guy who loved to call me crazy but wanted me to be there for him when he needed emotional support. I think of the time I got a drink with an old flame. At the end of the night he held my hand and said “nothing fazes you, Taylor.” I thought, *no, things definitely do. Maybe you just don’t see it.* I set up the pink curtain and pink tablecloth in my studio. I bake a cake and frost it with white and pink icing.

I set up a situation that hovers between a domestic scene and a performative space. I talk about gender performativity with scholar Linda Nicholson. I ask about the “off-stage” moments. I imagine coming home, taking my bra and shoes off, and being myself. Free from the mandates of gender. She tells me there is no offstage. I look to my work – these domestic objects in my work– cakes, teapots, glasses of milk – live on a stage.

I put the smiley face adorned cake on the table. I roll the camera. I intend to slice the cake with a plastic butter knife and carry the slices to another plate. I will create an illusion that they are falling against the magenta curtain. I accidentally drop the first slice on the table. I keep going.

Niceness is agreeability – and this expectation neatly lives within the confines of “emotion work” – both suppression and evocation. Women are expected to be the caretakers. I think of the many times that I’ve listened and sympathized but was told to stop worrying when it was my turn to be supported. *Lol sorry, I’m like totally being a garbage person!* is a video that explores the frustrations and performances of this imbalance [figures 12 and 13].

I cut the cake

“remember that one time”

[I balance it on the fork]

[cake falls]

When we told each other, what makes us feel like we’re losing our minds

[cake goes “splat!”]

And you told me yours

[I cut another slice]

and I told you “I get it!”

[balance the slice on the fork]

And held your hand. And then I told you mine

[Drop the slice]

And you told me I was overreacting

[Cake goes splat]

And I was kind of mad but I didn’t wanna start a fight or anything.^{xxxiii}

I am in college, the beginning of my senior year. It's a lonely Friday night – I'm skimming Netflix to find something to watch. I settle on *Me You, and Everyone We Know*, a film directed by and starring Miranda July. She sees the man she likes with his ex. She goes to the car. She is crying. She is driving. I have been there. I think this seems like a universal moment. This intimate, vulnerable moment. She is the only one in the car, but I think passersby can see her. She takes out a whiteboard marker and writes "FUCK" across the windshield. It's a quiet gesture, but profound. I want to make a moment that feels that way.

There is a subtle process of destruction in my performances. My exhausted face when a man won't stop talking. The drink that depletes as I look uncomfortable. The cake that never makes it to the plate. These little moments that silently scream *I am fed up*.



For the nice girls in the shows by bad men

It's October 2017, I'm trying to read an essay but I can't stop checking social media. Less than two weeks ago, two journalists for *The New York Times* broke the story – “Harvey Weinstein Paid off Sexual Harassment Accusers for Decades.”^{xxxiv} The reporters – Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey- relay stories of gross power imbalances spanning decades. Executive producer Harvey Weinstein invited actress Ashley Judd to his hotel room. She thought it was a business meeting – he was wearing a bathrobe. He asked her to watch him shower or give him a massage. Another woman, Emily Nestor, worked as a temp for him. In 2014, he invited her to his hotel room and told her that if she accepted his sexual advances, he would advance her career. The stories go on. Weinstein uses the promise of career advancement as a reward for accepting his sexual advances. There is a gross power imbalance.^{xxxv}

The #metoo hashtag is popping up in my feed. Actress Alyssa Milano put out a call on Twitter, asking followers to reply to her tweet with the words “me too” if they have experienced sexual harassment or assault. [figure 14]^{xxxvi} The platform is flooded with the hashtag.

These statements are a signifier – a way of saying that you have experienced sexual assault without telling the whole story. But some want to share theirs. I see story after story. I check the headlines over the next few days.

From NPR: “In The Wake Of Harvey Weinstein Scandal, Women Say #MeToo.”^{xxxvii} From *The New York Times* is “#MeToo Floods Social Media With Stories of Harassment and Assault.”^{xxxviii}

There is a wave. Harvey Weinstein’s name is everywhere. Women are heard.

I look at stories from my friends. They sound like mine. We are all coming together.

The news is plastered with stories from #metoo. Celebrities are speaking out about abusive men. TV show hosts are losing their jobs over allegations. Politicians are being voted out of office. Articles detailing how to behave in a post #metoo age are popping up. The culture is changing.

It is February 2018. I am sitting in an auditorium watching Tarana Burke give a speech. She is credited with creating the #metoo movement. Years before, working with children who experienced sexual abuse, she created the “Me Too” activist group, in which kids could write “me too” on a piece of paper if they needed help. It was a quiet – and impactful – signifier. Her work has expanded to have a wide reach. She is the senior director of the nonprofit “Girls for Gender Equity.”^{xxxix} During her speech, she tells the audience that #metoo was never about toppling powerful men. It was about women having their stories heard.

I think of my stories. I think of the stories of my friends and the ones I’ve heard on the news. The stories where I couldn’t say no, she couldn’t say no.

Niceness means not saying no. Niceness means being up for anything. Niceness means going with the flow. It’s not nice to protest, is it? In the Kantor and Twohey article, Ashley Judd is

quoted saying “How do I get out of the room as fast as possible without alienating Harvey Weinstein?” as she recalls his actions.^{xl}

I wonder how niceness is learned. Obviously through societal pressures, but what about representation?

I think of the traits of female niceness. Agreeability. Smiling and nodding. Never saying no. Having low self-confidence. Providing the labor to keep the conversation going. I make a list of these traits. These traits maintain power imbalances. If a woman is seen as out of place for speaking her mind, then her place is implicitly to sit there and take it.

My video works all react to situations: to the men who bought me drinks and made me feel uncomfortable, to a man who wouldn't stop talking, to the expectation of emotional labor.

I watch TV shows or films made, produced, or written by men who were exposed as committing sexual harassment or assault in the #metoo movement or are part of this discourse. Woody Allen. James Toback. Harvey Weinstein. Louie CK. James Franco. Aziz Ansari. My central question is: if female niceness maintains power imbalances, can I see this on screen?

I look for a female character smiling and nodding. Agreeing. Backchanneling. Having low self-confidence. Making her body smaller. Providing emotion work. I think this will be so easy.

I am watching Woody Allen's *Manhattan* for the first time, list in tow. The film is dripping with infantilization. But by necessity – Allen's character, Isaac, is dating a 17-year-old girl. She asks "don't you want me to stay over?" in a timid voice after a presumed hook up. He lists the reason why she shouldn't – a slippery slope that leads to her living with him. She finally acquiesces to his reasoning. When they run into their friends in the art museum, he speaks for her opinions. She silently nods or smiles and agrees with him. These moments are small and subtle but build onto something larger – women exist as an agreeable plot device to serve the male ego. Virginia Woolf wrote these words almost a century ago, but they still ring true:

A very queer, composite being thus emerges. Imaginatively she is of the highest importance; practically she is completely insignificant. She pervades poetry from cover to cover; she is all but absent from history. She dominates the lives of kings and conquerors in fiction; in fact she was the slave of any boy whose parents forced a ring upon her finger. Some of the most inspired words, some of the most profound thoughts in literature fall from her lips; in real life she could hardly read, could scarcely spell, and was the property of her husband.^{xli}

Later in the film he picks her up from school. She surprises him with a harmonica as they sit at a counter, she is drinking a milkshake. He then dumps her. When she speaks up, he says "don't be so smart." She cries. He puts a hand on her shoulder. She says leave me alone. He doesn't move his hand. She says it again. The scene ends with his hand still on her shoulder. If she couldn't have her own opinion on art at the museum, why would he listen to her in this moment?

Allen was later revealed to have raped his adoptive daughter, Dylan Farrow.^{xlii} He took advantage of a young girl in real life, which makes this scene disgusting.

This is a quiet moment, but I want to know what's going on in her mind. To date and be infantilized by a man twice her age. Then to be dumped while drinking milkshakes – the pinnacle of an innocent drink – when he doesn't even listen to your pleas to be left alone.

In slow motion, I smash a pink harmonica with a milkshake glass- For Tracy [figure 15]. With each thud, the pink ice cream splatters on the curtain. I keep smashing. The harmonica dents but it does not break. Out of the frame, I am wearing close-toed shoes and safety glasses because I expect the glass to violently shatter. I keep trying. This is futile. It will never bust. I am just getting milkshake everywhere.

When I look at the footage I realize how timid my smashing is. Little movements. No monumental whack. I am reminded once again of Iris Young:

Women often do not perceive themselves as capable of lifting and carrying heavy things, pushing and shoving with significant force, pulling, squeezing, grasping, or twisting with force. When we attempt such tasks, we frequently fail to summon the full possibilities of our muscular coordination, position, poise, and bearing. Women tend to not put their whole bodies into engagement in a physical task with the same ease and naturalness as men.^{xliii}

Nothing breaks.

I look to Pippiloti Rist's 1997 video piece *Ever is Over All* [figure 16]. The performer skips down the street, swinging a large flower. She breaks car windows – how can a flower break a car window? She is smiling. The destruction doesn't matter. The police woman salutes at her. I

wonder if this is supposed to be reality or utopia. Reality because she is smiling while smashing things. She is angry, but not allowed to be angry. Utopia because she is smiling while smashing things – they’re actually breaking – and she’s getting away with it.

Abusive men keep abusing. Women share stories. I wonder when this all will stop.

I go down the list of famous men accused of assault and harassment. Director James Toback is there. I check his movies, none I had ever seen. I start to watch *The Pick-Up Artist*. The protagonist, Jack, approaches women on the street and uses pick-up lines on them –they usually seem annoyed then smile as they give him his number. He finds a woman named Mona. He uses a variation of his standard line on her (telling her she looks like a Picasso painting) and she smiles and nods. But she is looking away in different directions. She rebuffs his advance by saying she is studying to become a priest (ha!), eventually running off to catch her bus. She knows what is going on. When he asks for her phone number, she makes the sign of the cross. This is a humorous moment, but take a look at the news. Multiple women came forward with stories of Toback sexually assaulting or harassing them after he invited them to a private place for an opportunity to advance their careers. He “combatively” denies it.^{xliv} Mona’s demure and funny rebuffing, watching it now, does not settle right. In a film centered around a man who has free reign over women on the street produced by a man who cornered women to take advantage of– what does this say about femininity and niceness?

I knock the tiny, framed pink print of a Picasso painting down with a pink purse. It happens in slow motion. It knocks over but does not break. *Thud, thud, thud* as it skids across the table. This is exhausting. For Mona [figure 17].

I am sitting on my couch, cross stitching and drinking a glass of wine. I go down the list of abusers. I turn on an episode – “Ladies and Gentlemen” – of Aziz Ansari’s Netflix show, *Master of None*. The episode begins with a bar scene. When Dev and Arnold are complaining about not getting the bartender’s attention, a woman is being harassed. A man puts two shots in front of Diana without even introducing himself. She smiles and says that she doesn’t want a shot. He gets more aggressive. She sarcastically apologizes. He asks her out. She makes a getaway by saying she needs to catch up with her friends. She never explicitly told him to leave, but her discomfort was implied within the script of niceness. Flash to later in the night. While Dev and Arnold are walking home, “Don’t Worry, Be Happy” playing in the background, Diana is followed home by the same man. She looks through her peephole – he is there, asking what went wrong in their relationship. She sighs and calls 911.

This scene is a successful take on the differences in vulnerability between men and women. I think when I first saw the episode in 2015 – I was relieved, *he got it*. This episode has a much different meaning now. I am sitting on my couch. I think to the January 2018 *babe dot net* article: “I went on a date with Aziz Ansari. It was the worst night of my life,” that took the internet by firestorm. The piece was published after the subject of the work came forward with her story after seeing Ansari wearing a *Times Up* pin at the 2018 Golden Globes.

I am in my studio the next morning. I revisit the *babe* article. “Grace,” the unnamed woman who says she was assaulted by Ansari details instances in his apartment after their first date. Within minutes, he was grabbing a condom. She says she “I said something like, ‘Whoa, let’s relax for a sec, let’s chill.’” He kept going.

I keep reading the article. This paragraph hits me hard.

Throughout the course of her short time in the apartment, she says she used verbal and non-verbal cues to indicate how uncomfortable and distressed she was. “Most of my discomfort was expressed in me pulling away and mumbling. I know that my hand stopped moving at some points,” she said. “I stopped moving my lips and turned cold.”^{xlvi}

He denies the claims, saying “by all indications” the sexual activity was “completely consensual.” He says he supports the movement.^{xlvi}

I am angry. I think of how painfully obvious Diana’s discomfort was in that opening scene. She did not say “no, leave me alone, fuck off,” in the bar, but it was understood that she did not want the attention. She wanted to be left alone. The viewer sympathized with her. I am so angry. “Grace” clearly wanted to be left alone, also. He didn’t listen.

The article took the internet by firestorm. Many sided with Aziz, many sided with Grace. In *The Atlantic’s* article, “Aziz Ansari and the Paradox of ‘No’,” Megan Garber addresses Grace’s critics – who said the woman had the ability to put her foot down and leave the situation.

But there is also the fact that the women of today live within the exhaust of longstanding demands on femininity: that women be pleasing. That they be compliant. That they be nice. That they avoid, in sexual encounters as in so many

other kinds, making things awkward. “No” is, in theory, available to anyone, at any time; in practice, however, it is a word of last resort—a word of legality. A word of transaction. A word in which progress collides with reticence: Everyone should be able to say it, but no one really wants to.^{xlvi}

He gave her a shot that she didn’t want. She politely refused – he didn’t listen. I throw it on the table, expecting it to shatter. It slowly falls and then hits the surface. It rolls around for a bit and stays still- for Diana [figure 18].

In *Semiotics of the Kitchen* by Martha Rosler, she confronts you. She whacks kitchen utensils as she goes through the alphabet. Looking at it, I want to laugh but it feels out of place. I think of the times when I was younger when the teacher got upset and someone laughed at her anger. I look at this piece and I think women’s frustration and anger is often not taken seriously. I am angry but I stop myself from expressing my feelings before I can actually reflect on them. I am afraid I will not be taken seriously. I am afraid of the anger being futile. I am afraid of ruining things. I am afraid of making things awkward. I am afraid of being labeled as crazy. I am afraid of not being taken seriously. Artist Karen Finley makes a point:

What’s weird is: often when a woman gets angry at a man, he’ll say this cliché: “You turn me on when you get mad!” as if to tame her. And there’s something about “taming” (or controlling) a woman struggling to assert herself, that’s really hideous.^{xlvi}

When one woman is angry, it is easy to dismiss her. When women are angry in numbers, they cannot be ignored. That is the power of the #metoo movement. Every time I open my computer, another story pops up. Every time I talk with another woman and talk about the movement, we share our stories. For women, this movement functions as a spectacle and a lived experience.

The work is situated in a space that hovers between domestic and performative. These stories are playing out in our living rooms and offices and on the screen. Like a stage. It's imitating each other – we watch the news in the same spaces where the spectators could be experiencing the same form of harassment or abuse. The movement is made of stories and then validating these unheard stories. That's the power of it. The flowers stand in unison. These stories stand in unison. Christina Pazzanese and Colleen Walsh recognize this power:

All of these movement moments that changed hearts and minds and moved a nation in the direction of justice have been rooted in storytelling.^{xlix}

On a Saturday afternoon, I turn on *Palo Alto*, a film based on the book by James Franco. He stars as the soccer coach, Mr. B who develops a relationship with his player, April. Watching a high schooler be romantically and sexually involved with a coach or adult gives me the creeps. I watch for niceness. He hired her as his child's babysitter. When he returns to his house after a date she is on the couch, doing homework. He sits next to her. He tells her it was a shitty date. They banter for a bit. He has lingering eye contact. She looks away and gets up, apologizing.

Later in the movie they've established a relationship – he says she can come over more often. She is doing homework at his house. He tells a joke. She provides niceties. She asks why he won't talk to her in school. He says he loves her, she looks disturbed and gets up to leave. She says she needs to be hanging out with boys her own age. He holds her arm. Later – and after a sexual encounter – she finds out one of her teammates is his new babysitter.

The part that wrenched my heart was when her counselor told her she needed to stick with soccer to help her college application. She has a panic attack in the bathroom. I am livid at how men take advantage of girls. Throughout the film, I see her discomfort covered up with niceness.

I think of the headlines of his abuse. I find the articles of women expressing anger after Franco showed up to the Golden Globes wearing a Times Up pin. Former students from Franco's acting school, Studio 4, came forward with their stories. One former student said she was working on one of Franco's films in a nude orgy scene. He removed protective guards from actresses' vaginas. Other students said Franco became hostile when they did not want to be topless on screen. Another woman who hoped to learn acting from Franco says he pressured her into oral sex. She noticed his penis was out of his pants and she asked if they could do this later. After he nudged her head down she did it because she "didn't want him to hate me."¹

I relate to the fear of being hated as a deterrent of standing up and making myself heard. I think of the times I had every damn right to be angry and just shrugged it off. Women are told we don't have the right to be angry.

I think back to the film. I remember April. How she was on the couch and she looked uncomfortable but she couldn't say no. The strange mixture of attraction to someone who has the ability to abuse their power. She is so young. She still has homework. For April, I open the folder and tear a pink loose-leaf sheet of paper out. I erase and crumple the blank sheet. I stab it with the pen, tearing it. I throw it aside. The slow motion shows nothing is on the paper. Nothing is being erased. All that's happening is paper being crumpled [figure 19].

I look at Harvey Weinstein's filmography: I know that this man was the tipping point. I feel pressure to represent something accurately. There are so many movies, so many stories.

The plot of *Playing by Heart* (1998, executive producer Harvey Weinstein) revolves around different characters' love stories. The opening scene shows Hugh, soaked and distraught, entering a bar and approaching a woman sitting alone, Allison. She says she does not want company. He says he lost his wife and son. She invites him for a drink where he tells her everything. She sympathizes and listens.

The next night he is at another bar and he tells a woman – “The Lawyer” how his wife cheated on him. She smiles and nods and sympathizes, finally getting to the point where she apologizes and has to leave. She tells Hugh that she is over two hours late, hesitating as she starts to get up. He holds her arm and doesn't let go, she gives him a polite kiss on the cheek goodbye. It's funny, kind of. These stories don't add up.

In wake of the allegations against Weinstein, Megan Garber discusses the “weaponization of awkwardness”:

Harvey Weinstein, on the tape recorded by the model Ambra Battilana Gutierrez as part of a New York Police Department sting operation, told her, “Don't embarrass me in the hotel.” And: “Honey, don't have a fight with me in the hallway.” And: “Please, you're making a big scene here. Please.” So many of the other men accused of predation, it has now become painfully clear, have in their own ways used those soft but crushing social pressures as weapons, both in moments of abuse and beyond: *Don't be dramatic. Don't make a scene. Please.*^{li}

It is later revealed Hugh practices his acting by telling sob stories to women in bars. A drag queen calls him out on his shit – the other women smile and nod and provide emotion work and backchanneling. They are the sympathizers. They listen. They validate his feelings.

Once again wearing safety glasses, I pick up a drink in a pink glass, dropping it on the table. In slow motion, the liquid splashes over the table. The glass hits the surface but does not break. I do this for *The Lawyer* [figure 20].

The slow motion creates a suspension and temptation – you want the glass to break, but it doesn't. Sharon Lockhart's video installation *Little Review* [figure 21] at the 2017 Venice Biennale shows a teenage girl, floating against a black screen, dancing in slow motion. A rhythmic chant repeats in the background. You, as the viewer, are waiting for something to happen while you predict her movements. The slow motion is excruciating but enthralling. By forcing you to watch every little detail, she, the dancer, is presented as important.

After decades of women being dismissed when they spoke up about sexual harassment and assault, finally, the culture is changing. I want to force the viewer to watch every moment of this glass falling, this harmonica smashing, this paper crumpling. These stories need to be heard.

Angelina Jolie is one of the actresses in the film. She revealed that Harvey Weinstein made unwanted advances towards her during the film's promotion.^{lii} As of October 2017, 84 women have accused him of sexual harassment and assault.^{liii} I look at Hugh's insistence of keeping

women at the table with him. I look at The Lawyer's awkward way of leaving the situation. I remember the quote from Ashley Judd where said she wondered how she could make an exit "without alienating Harvey Weinstein." Niceness is putting up with it. I once again am reminded of the power imbalances.

I am watching *Louie*, the show created by Louie C.K. He visits a bookstore and finds the worker, Liz, attractive. They banter back and forth for a few days over book choices for his daughter. He returns to the store and asks her if he can talk to her for a second. She agrees. They go to another room. Her back is to a bookshelf. He is close to her face. In a long ramble, he asks her out in a quasi-manipulative way. He says how awful it must be for a woman in New York. He tells her he likes her "because she's nice." All during this, she smiles and nods. The situation seems socially awkward, yet innocuous. Until you check the news. In the Fall of 2017 multiple women came forward with stories of Louie CK inviting them to situations with no easy exit – like hanging out in his hotel room – and him forcing them to watch him masturbate.^{liv} He admitted to the allegations shortly after.^{lv} This situation compromises the scene in question: no longer is it a cute story of a budding romance. Seeing her against the bookshelf, smiling and nodding, makes me uncomfortable after reading this new development.

These small vignettes are my interpretation of these characters' internal dialogues. The push, the smash, the whack, the drop, the tear of frustration in the face of niceness.

I knock down a tiny pink bookshelf with tiny pink books, For Liz [figure 22]. The speed is dramatic and slow but the impact is tiny. The books are stuck in the shelf. I keep having to smash

it against the table. It doesn't break. The books are tiny. The books are flying. These stories are flying.

I set up my pink table and pink curtain by myself. I shoot the videos with safety goggles and close toed shoes. I fully intend on there being possibility of hurting myself. Of broken glass on the floor. Of shards flying. The glasses bounce, the harmonica barely gets dented, the paper, bookshelf and frame stays intact. There is a thud, there is a whack, but no obliteration.

I look to the media: another abuser is fired or boycotted. Another story of harassment surfaces. It's like a sick game of whack-a-mole: when we think we're making progress, another case surfaces.

I think of the times I smiled and nodded – when I retrospect I wish I screamed and walked away. Niceness is a reflex. Women have been conditioned to be the pleasers – and the patriarchal society doesn't always reward acting outside of this script.

I try to break the glass but it bounces. One may think this is because I didn't try hard enough. I think of Grace's critics who said if she really didn't want to have sex with Aziz Ansari, she would have gotten up and walked away. There is more than one way of saying no. There is more than one way to try to break a glass.

This movement has relied on women's stories, women's anger. But it cannot be placed on our backs – culture must change. Men's behavior must change. The harmonica, the shot glass, the

bookshelf cannot fully break unless we have support. We can chip away at it, but the job will not be done. This shouldn't fall to us.

Conclusion

My work in video and installation explores the expectation for women to be nice as part of their gender performance. My work points to these pressures that creates a double bind: women are kept behind and must put up with uncomfortable situations if they perform niceness yet are labeled as unfeminine and out of line if they do not follow the social script. Through my visual vocabulary, I demonstrate this tension through the visual language women are given: flowers and pink. Referencing the loaded connotations of the color, my work explores how pink is associated with weakness and tranquility.

Within my work I push back against this cultural mythology and societal expectation, I smash pink drinking glasses and pink harmonicas. I perform the performance, collapsing the gender performativity of female niceness into performances in my video work. I source audio from the shows created by the men outed in the #metoo movement over these actions. I smash the harmonica – but it does not break. This futility references the larger cultural conversation around the movement: women's anger is exposing these men, but their anger alone cannot stop this behavior. Culture must change.

Endnotes:

ⁱ Creativetime.org, “Who Cares.”

ⁱⁱ Judith Butler “Bodily Inscriptions, Performative Subversions,” in *The Judith Butler Reader*, ed. by Sarah Salih (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2004), 111.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid, 114.

^{iv} Harriet Lerner, *The Dance of Anger*, (Harper & Row, 1985) 5.

^v Rudman and Glick, “Feminized Management and Backlash toward Agentic Women.”

^{vi} Laurie A. Rudman and Peter Glick, “Prescriptive Gender Stereotypes and Backlash Toward Agentic Women.” *Journal of Social Issues* 57, no. 4, (2001): 743.

^{vii} “Temper Definition in the Cambridge English Dictionary.”

^{viii} Arlie Russell Hochschild, “Emotion Work, Feeling Rules, and Social Structure.” *American Journal of Sociology* 85, no. 3. (1979): 16.

^{ix} Lerner, 1-2.

^x Robin Lakoff, *Language and Woman’s Place* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 15.

^{xi} Robin Lakoff, *Language and Woman’s Place* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 54

^{xii} Pamela Fishman, “Interaction.” *Social Problems* 25, no. 4 (1978): 402.

^{xiii} Penelope Eckert and Sally McConnell-Ginet, *Language and Gender* (Cambridge University Press, 2013.), 110.

^{xiv} Fishman 404-405.

^{xv} Iris Young, *Throwing like a Girl and Other Essays in Feminist Philosophy and Social Theory*, (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1990), 145.

^{xvi} Sandra Bartky. “Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power,” in Weitz, Rose, ed. *The Politics of Women’s Bodies: Sexuality, Appearance, and Behavior*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998, 30.

^{xvii} Lerner 1-2.

^{xviii} Arlie Russell Hochschild Author, *The Managed Heart Commercialization of Human Feeling*. 168

^{xix} Laurie A. Rudman, *The Social Psychology of Gender* (New York: Guilford Press, 2008), 22, 197.

^{xx} Lerner, 2.

^{xxi} Laurie A. Rudman and Peter Glick, “Prescriptive Gender Stereotypes and Backlash Toward Agentic Women.” 759.

^{xxii} Kate Zambreno, (Los Angeles: Semiotext, 2012), *Heroines*. 57.

^{xxiii} Bartky, 37.

^{xxiv} Peggy Orenstein, *Cinderella Ate My Daughter* (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 62.

^{xxv} Genschow et al, Does Baker-Miller pink reduce aggression in prison detention cells? A critical empirical examination, *Psychology, Crime & Law*, 21:5 (2015), 492.

^{xxvi} Alex Wynick, “Jails Painted PINK to Calm Inmates but Prisoners Complain They Are Humiliated,” *Daily Mirror*, 2013.

^{xxvii} Paige K. Bradley, “Lily van Der Stokker at Koenig & Clinton.” *Artforum*, 2014, <https://www.artforum.com/picks/lily-van-der-stokker-48234>.

^{xxviii} Clark et al., Clark et al., *Lily Van Der Stokker*. 138.

-
- ^{xxix} Scott Indrisek, "In Laura Owens's New Whitney Show, Painting Is Serious Fun." *Artsy.net*, November 7, 2017. <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-laura-owenss-new-whitney-painting-serious-fun>
- ^{xxx} "Simulacrum | Definition of Simulacrum by Merriam-Webster."
- ^{xxxi} Text from my video work, *Conversation Captivity!*
- ^{xxxii} "Definition of PERFORMANCE."
- ^{xxxiii} Text from my video "lol sorry I'm totally being a garbage person!"
- ^{xxxiv} Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey, "Harvey Weinstein Paid Off Sexual Harassment Accusers for Decades." *The New York Times*, October 5, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/05/us/harvey-weinstein-harassment-allegations.html>
- ^{xxxv} Ibid.
- ^{xxxvi} Anna Codrea-Rado, "#MeToo Floods Social Media With Stories of Harassment and Assault." *The New York Times*, October 16, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/16/technology/metoo-twitter-facebook.html>.
- ^{xxxvii} "In The Wake Of Harvey Weinstein Scandal, Women Say #MeToo." All Things Considered, *National Public Radio*, October 16, 2017, <https://www.npr.org/2017/10/16/558165331/in-the-wake-of-harvey-weinstein-scandal-women-say-metoo>.
- ^{xxxviii} Codrea-Rado.
- ^{xxxix} Emma Brookes, "Me Too Founder Tarana Burke." *The Guardian*, January 15, 2018, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jan/15/me-too-founder-tarana-burke-women-sexual-assault>.
- ^{xl} Kantor and Twohey
- ^{xli} Virginia Woolf, "If Shakespeare Had a Sister" from *A Room of One's Own*, 1929 (accessed online) <https://www.d.umn.edu/~tbacig/cst1010/chs/woolfe.html>.
- ^{xlii} Corinna Burford, "Dylan Farrow Relives Woody Allen Sexual-Assault Allegation." *Vulture*, January 18, 2018, <http://www.vulture.com/2018/01/dylan-farrow-relives-woody-allen-sexual-assault-allegation.html>.
- ^{xliii} Young, 145.
- ^{xliv} Hillel Aron, "James Toback's Combative On-the-Record Denial." *Rolling Stone*, October 27, 2017, <https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/news/james-tobacks-on-the-record-denial-of-allegations-w510346>.
- ^{xlv} Katie Way "I Went on a Date with Aziz Ansari. It Turned into the Worst Night of My Life." *Babe*, January 13, 2018, <https://babe.net/2018/01/13/aziz-ansari-28355>.
- ^{xlvi} Katie Way, "Aziz Ansari Issues Statement Denying Sexual Misconduct." *Babe*, January 15, 2018. <https://babe.net/2018/01/15/aziz-ansari-statement-28407>.
- ^{xlvii} Megan Garber, "Aziz Ansari and the Paradox of 'No.'" *The Atlantic*, January 16, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2018/01/aziz-ansari-and-the-paradox-of-no/550556/>.
- ^{xlviii} Karen Finley. "Karen Finley," Interview by Andrea Juno, *Angry Women*. August 1999, 49.
- ^{xlx} Christina Pazzanese and Colleen Walsh, "#MeToo Surge Could Change Society in Pivotal Ways, Harvard Analysts Say." *The Harvard Gazette*, December 21, 2017, <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2017/12/metoo-surge-could-change-society-in-pivotal-ways-harvard-analysts-say/>.

ⁱ Kaitlyn Tiffany, “James Franco Accused of Sexual Exploitation or Abuse by Five Women.” *The Verge*, January 11, 2018, <https://www.theverge.com/2018/1/11/16878038/james-franco-sexual-abuse-allegations-students-golden-globes>.

ⁱⁱ Megan Garber, “The Weaponization of Awkwardness.” *The Atlantic*, December 15, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2017/12/the-weaponization-of-awkwardness/548291/>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Nardine Saad, “Harvey Weinstein’s Accusers.” *LA Times*, October 31, 2017, <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/la-et-weinstein-accusers-list-20171011-htm1story.html>.

^{liii} Sara M Moniuszko and Cara Kelly, “Harvey Weinstein Scandal: A Complete List of the 84 Accusers.” *USA Today*, October 27, 2017, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/life/people/2017/10/27/weinstein-scandal-complete-list-accusers/804663001/>.

^{liv} Ryzik, Buckley, and Kantor, “Louis C.K. Is Accused by 5 Women of Sexual Misconduct.” *The New York Times*, November 9, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/09/arts/television/louis-ck-sexual-misconduct.html>.

^{lv} “Louis C.K. Responds to Accusations.” Statement in the *New York Times*, November 10, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/10/arts/television/louis-ck-statement.html>.

Bibliography

- “#MeToo Surge Could Change Society in Pivotal Ways, Harvard Analysts Say.” *Harvard Gazette* (blog), December 21, 2017. <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2017/12/metoo-surge-could-change-society-in-pivotal-ways-harvard-analysts-say/>.
- “Definition of PERFORMANCE.” Accessed March 15, 2018. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/performance>.
- “Dylan Farrow Relives Woody Allen Sexual-Assault Allegation.” Accessed February 8, 2018. <http://www.vulture.com/2018/01/dylan-farrow-relives-woody-allen-sexual-assault-allegation.html>.
- “I Went on a Date with Aziz Ansari. It Turned into the Worst Night of My Life.” *babe*, January 13, 2018. <https://babe.net/2018/01/13/aziz-ansari-28355>.
- “In The Wake Of Harvey Weinstein Scandal, Women Say #MeToo.” NPR.org. Accessed March 15, 2018. <https://www.npr.org/2017/10/16/558165331/in-the-wake-of-harvey-weinstein-scandal-women-say-metoo>.
- “James Toback’s Combative On-the-Record Denial.” *Rolling Stone*. Accessed February 8, 2018. <https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/news/james-tobacks-on-the-record-denial-of-allegations-w510346>.
- “Lily van Der Stokker at Koenig & Clinton.” Accessed February 15, 2018. <https://www.artforum.com/picks/lily-van-der-stokker-48234>.
- “Louis C.K. Is Accused by 5 Women of Sexual Misconduct - The New York Times.” Accessed February 8, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/09/arts/television/louis-ck-sexual-misconduct.html>.
- “Louis C.K. Responds to Accusations: ‘These Stories Are True’ - The New York Times.” Accessed February 8, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/10/arts/television/louis-ck-statement.html>.
- “Simulacrum | Definition of Simulacrum by Merriam-Webster.” Accessed March 29, 2018. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/simulacrum>.
- “Temper Definition in the Cambridge English Dictionary.” Accessed March 28, 2018. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/temper>.
- “Who Cares.” Accessed April 10, 2018. http://creativetime.org/programs/archive/2006/whocares/projects_fusco.html.
- Brookes, Emma. “Me Too Founder Tarana Burke: ‘You Have to Use Your Privilege to Serve Other People.’” *The Guardian*, January 15, 2018, sec. Life and style. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jan/15/me-too-founder-tarana-burke-women-sexual-assault>.
- Clark, Martin, Lily van der Stokker, Charles Esche, John Waters, and Tate Gallery St Ives. *Lily Van Der Stokker: It Doesn’t Have to Mean Anything But It Looks Good* (exh. Catalogue). Tate Publishing, 2010.
- Codrea-Rado, Anna. “#MeToo Floods Social Media With Stories of Harassment and Assault.” *The New York Times*, October 16, 2017, sec. Technology. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/16/technology/metoo-twitter-facebook.html>.
- Eckert, Penelope, and Sally McConnell-Ginet. *Language and Gender*. Cambridge University Press, 2013.

- Fishman, Pamela M. "Interaction: The Work Women Do." *Social Problems* 25, no. 4 (1978): 397–406. <https://doi.org/10.2307/800492>.
- Hochschild, Arlie Russell. *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983.
- Indrisek, Scott. "In Laura Owens's New Whitney Show, Painting Is Serious Fun." *Artsy*, November 7, 2017. <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-laura-owenss-new-whitney-painting-serious-fun>.
- Kantor, Jodi, and Megan Twohey. "Harvey Weinstein Paid Off Sexual Harassment Accusers for Decades." *The New York Times*, October 5, 2017, sec. U.S. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/05/us/harvey-weinstein-harassment-allegations.html>.
- Lakoff, Robin Tolmach. *Language and Woman's Place*. New York: Harper & Row, 1975.
- Laurie A. Rudman. *The Social Psychology of Gender: How Power and Intimacy Shape Gender Relations*. Texts in Social Psychology. New York: Guilford Press, 2008.
- Nemitz, Barbara, Hideto Fuse, and Museumberg Flensburg--Städtische Sammlungen. *Pink: The Exposed Color in Contemporary Art and Culture*. Ostfildern; New York: Hatje Cantz ; D.A.P. distributor, 2006.
- Oliver Genschow, Thomas Noll, Michaela Wänke & Robert Gersbach (2015) Does Baker-Miller pink reduce aggression in prison detention cells? A critical empirical examination, *Psychology, Crime & Law*, 21:5, 482-489, DOI: 10.1080/1068316X.2014.989172
- Orenstein, Peggy. *Cinderella Ate My Daughter: Dispatches from the Front Lines of the New Girlie-Girl Culture*. 1st ed. New York: HarperCollins, 2011.
- Rudman, Laurie A., and Peter Glick. "Feminized Management and Backlash toward Agentic Women: The Hidden Costs to Women of a Kinder, Gentler Image of Middle Managers." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 77, no. 5 (1999): 1004–10. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.77.5.1004>.
- Rudman, Laurie A., and Peter Glick. "Prescriptive Gender Stereotypes and Backlash Toward Agentic Women." *Journal of Social Issues* 57, no. 4 (2001): 743–762. <https://doi.org/10.1111/0022-4537.00239>.
- Salih, Sara, and Judith Butler, eds. *The Judith Butler Reader*. 1 edition. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2004.
- Tiffany, Kaitlyn. "James Franco Accused of Sexual Exploitation or Abuse by Five Women." *The Verge*, January 11, 2018. <https://www.theverge.com/2018/1/11/16878038/james-franco-sexual-abuse-allegations-students-golden-globes>.
- Wynick, Alex. "Jails Painted PINK to Calm Inmates but Prisoners Complain They Are Humiliated." *mirror*, September 12, 2013. <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/weird-news/swiss-prisons-painted-pink-calm-2268174>.
- Young, Iris Marion. *Throwing like a Girl and Other Essays in Feminist Philosophy and Social Theory*. Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1990.
- Zambreno, Kate. *Heroines*. Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext, 2012.

List of illustrations:

Figures 1 and 2: Taylor Yocom, *just hold it out for prom*, hand sewn pillows (prom dress, stuffing, thread), 10x9x3", 2016.

Figure 3: Taylor Yocom, *nice*, mixed media video installation (12:36), 7x7x2', 2017.

Figure 4: Taylor Yocom, *she's so nice, isn't she?*, phone, MDF, wallpaper, 2x6', 2017.

Figure 5: *Huh (installation view)*, Acrylic paint on wood and acrylic paint on cut vinyl, dimensions variable. 2014. <http://koenigandclinton.com/exhibitions/lily-van-der-stokker-2/>

Figures 6 and 7: Left: Figure 6. Lily van der Stokker, *untitled*, drawing, dimensions unavailable. From: Lily Van Der Stokker: It Doesn't Have to Mean Anything But it Looks Good. Clark, Martin et al. Tate Publishing, 2010. Plate 19. Left: Figure 7. Left: Figure 6. Lily van der Stokker, *untitled*, drawing, dimensions unavailable. From: Lily Van Der Stokker: It Doesn't Have to Mean Anything But it Looks Good. Clark, Martin et al. Tate Publishing, 2010. Plate 41.

Figures 8 and 9: Figure 8 (left): Laura Owens, *Untitled*, 2004. Acrylic and oil on linen, 66 x 66 in. Collection of Nina Moore. From: <http://whitney.org/Exhibitions/LauraOwens#artworks-6>

Figure 9: Laura Owens, *Untitled*, 2013, Acrylic, oil, Flashe, and charcoal on linen, 137.5 x 120" From: <https://www.owenslaura.com/piece/lo-482/>

Figures 10 and 11: Taylor Yocom, stills from *Conversation Captivity!*, digital video, 2:24. 2016.

Figures 12 and 13: Taylor Yocom, stills from *lol sorry I'm like totally being a garbage person!* digital video, 5:56. 2017.

Figure 14: Screenshot from Alyssa Milano's twitter – taken March 29, 2018. https://twitter.com/alyssa_milano/status/919659438700670976?lang=en

Figure 15: Taylor Yocom, still from *for the nice girls in shows by bad men*, digital video, 8:36. 2018.

Figure 16: Pippiloti Rist, *Ever is Over All*, 1997, Two channel video installation, dimensions variable. Museum of Modern Art, New York. From: https://www.moma.org/collection/works/81191?locale=en&page=1&with_images=true

Figure 17: Taylor Yocom, still from *for the nice girls in shows by bad men*, digital video, 8:36. 2018.

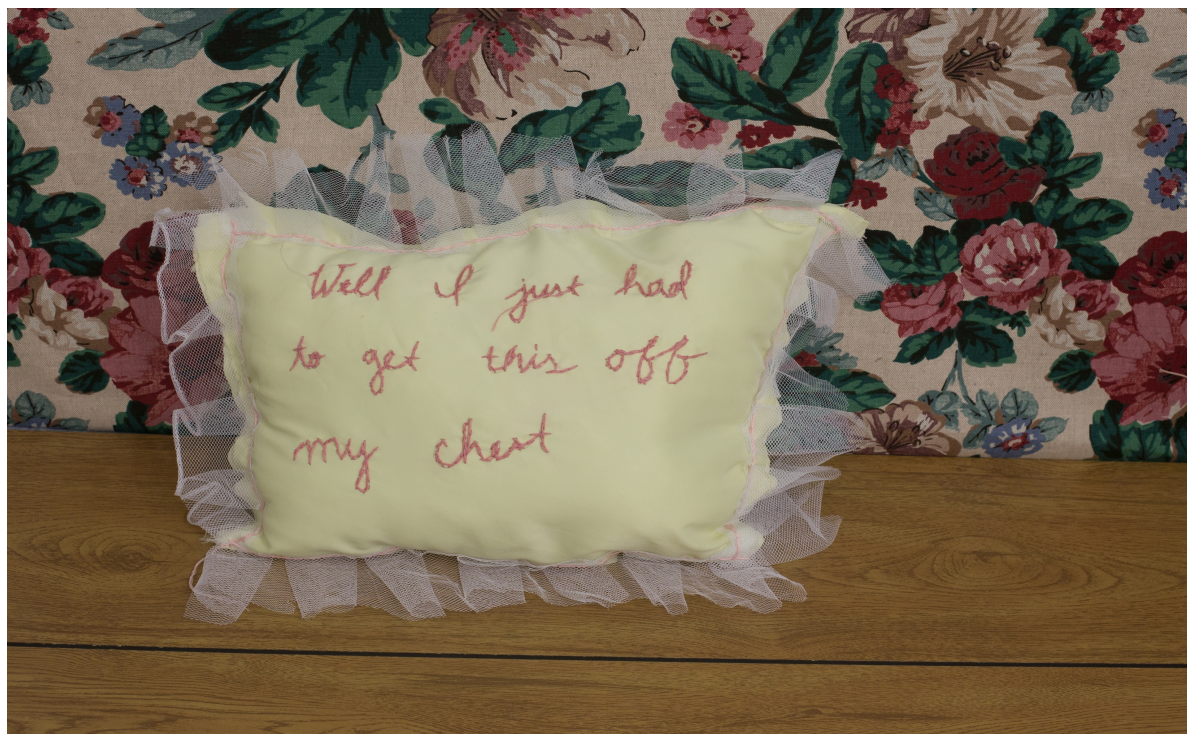
Figure 18: Taylor Yocom, still from *for the nice girls in shows by bad men*, digital video, 8:36. 2018.

Figure 19: Taylor Yocom, still from *for the nice girls in shows by bad men*, digital video, 8:36. 2018.

Figure 20: Taylor Yocom, still from *for the nice girls in shows by bad men*, digital video, 8:36. 2018.

Figure 21: Sharon Lockhart, installation view from *Little Review*, single channel projection, 2017. From: <http://labiennale.art.pl/en/wystawy/little-review/>

Figure 22: Taylor Yocom, still from *for the nice girls in shows by bad men*, digital video, 8:36. 2018.



Figures 1 (top) and 2



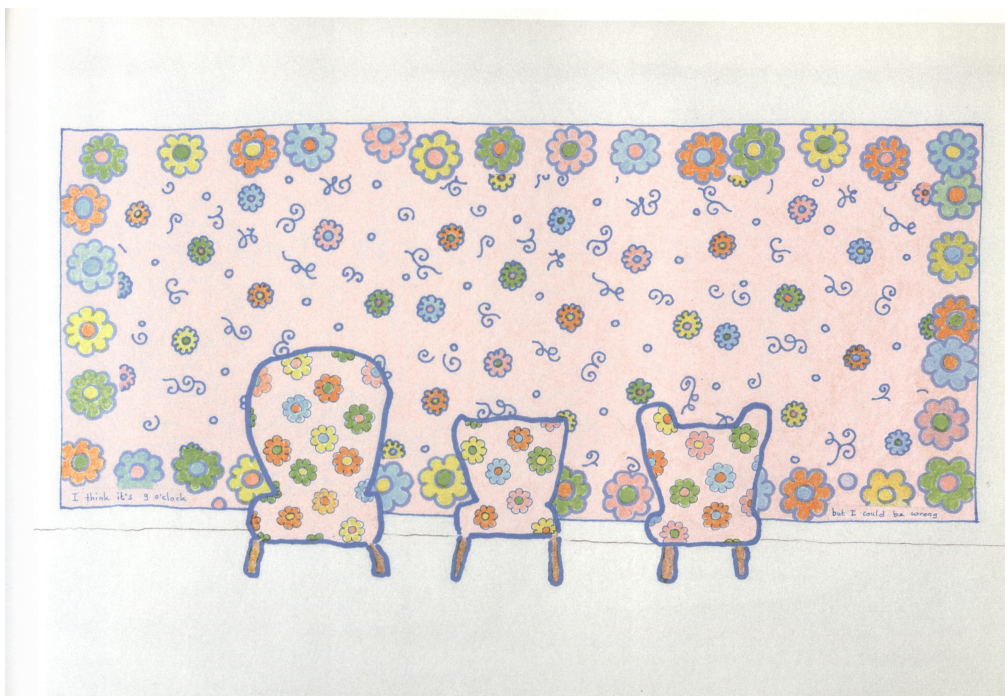
Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figures 6 (top) and 7



Figures 8 (top) and 9



Figures 10 (top) and 11



*and then
you rolled
your eyes*

Figures 12 (top) and 13:



Alyssa Milano ✓

@Alyssa_Milano

Follow



If you've been sexually harassed or assaulted write 'me too' as a reply to this tweet.

Me too.

Suggested by a friend: "If all the women who have been sexually harassed or assaulted wrote 'Me too.' as a status, we might give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem."

1:21 PM - 15 Oct 2017

24,685 Retweets 53,305 Likes



68K 25K 53K

Figure 14



Figure 15



Figure 16



Figure 17



Figure 18



Figure 19



Figure 20:

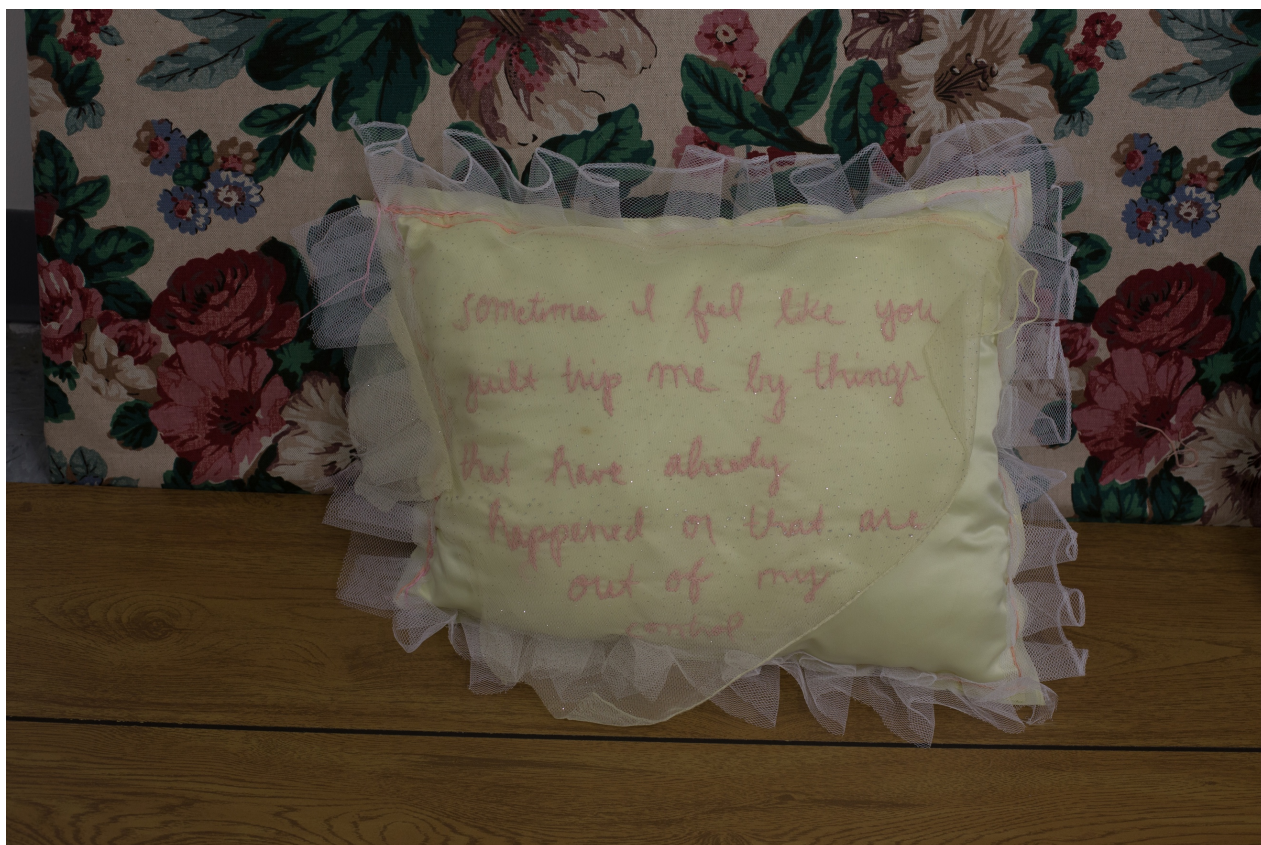


Figure 21

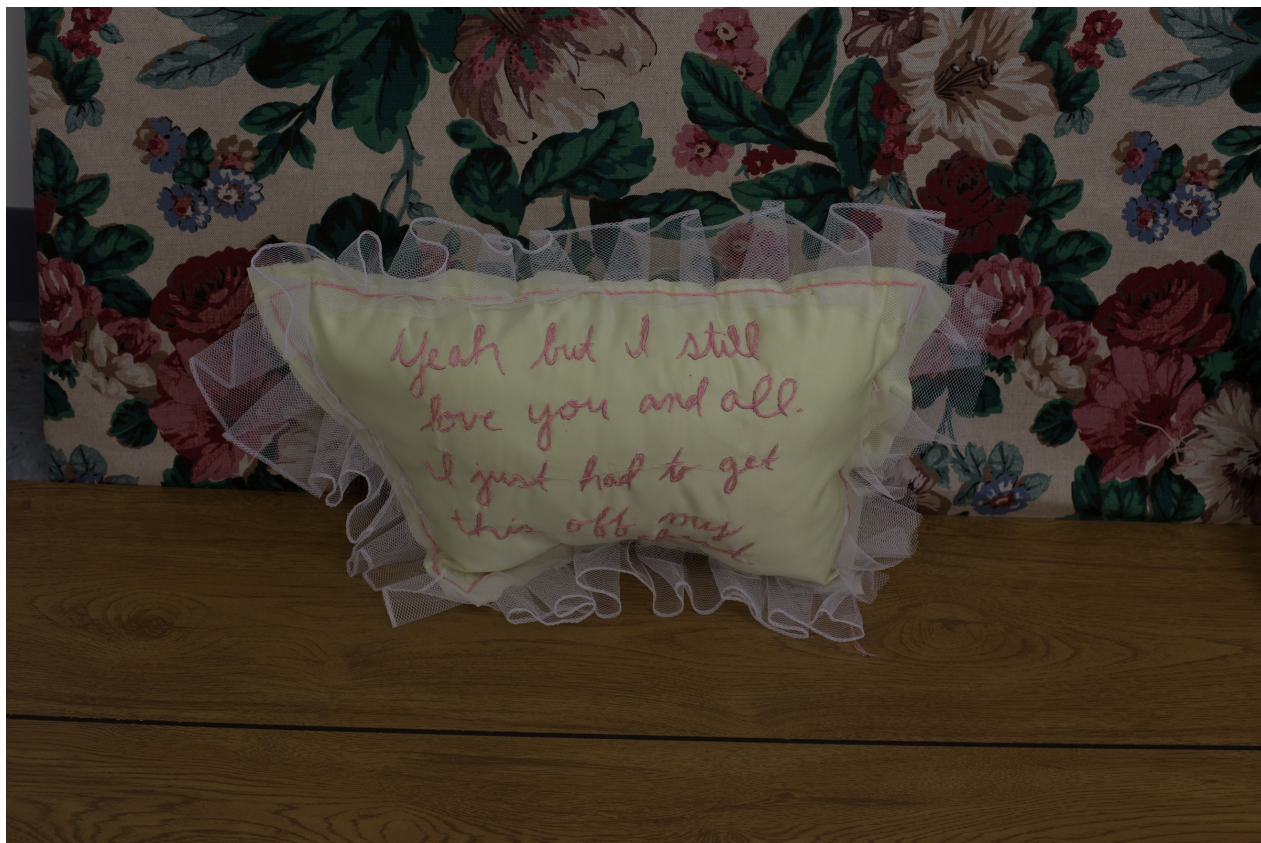


Figure 22

Plates:



Sometimes I feel like you guilt trip me by things that have already happened or that are out of my control, Mixed media (prom dress, thread, stuffing), 14x10x6", 2016.



Yeah but I still love you and all, I just had to get this off my chest, Mixed media (prom dress, thread, stuffing), 12x8x6", 2016.



Just hold it out for prom, Installation shot of 2 min video, Dimensions variable, 2016.



Nanny's Daily Journal (pm snack for Taylor), Digital inkjet print, 4x6'', 2016.



Nanny's Daily Journal (pm snack for Tess), Digital inkjet print, 4x6'', 2016.



Outtake shot from the early iteration of “nice,” digital video, 2017.



Outtake shot from the early iteration of “nice,” digital video, 2017.



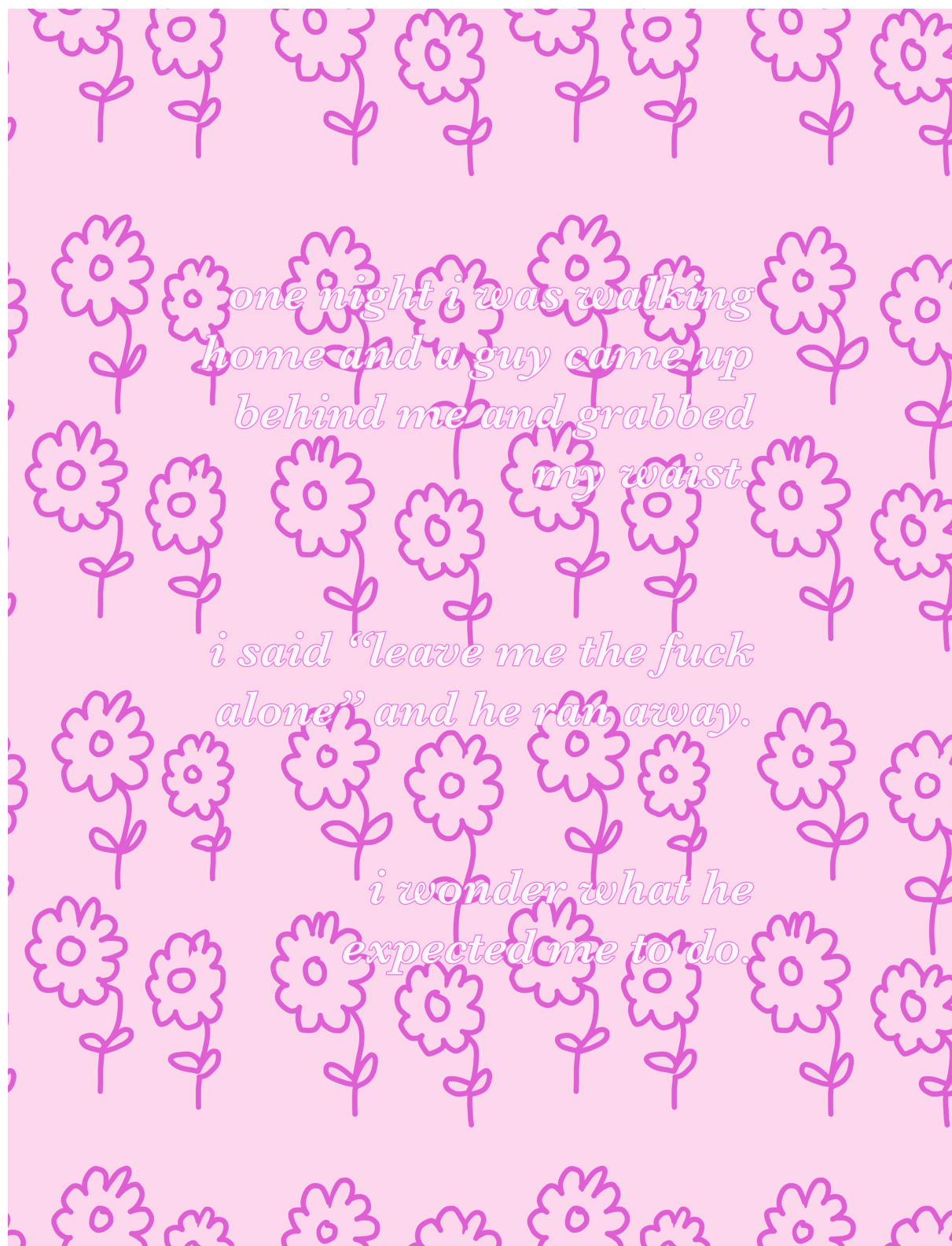
no more mrs. nice girl!, Digital video, 00:00:42, 2017.



Installation shot: “*she’s so nice, isn’t she?*”/ “*how to be a nice girl!*”, Painted MDF with custom printed wallpaper, landline phone with audio, headphones with audio, vinyl., 2’x6’ and 2’x2’, 2017.



but nice ladies don't talk about that, right?, Digital video, 00:01:38, 2017.



I still wonder what he expected me to do, Digital drawing – digital inkjet print, 21”x28”, 2017.



I don't know what to call this yet but I hope it makes you feel uncomfortable, Digital video, 00:01:47, 2018



It's okay, you can go ahead and cry about it, Digital Video, 00:00:58, 2018.



For the nice girls in shows by bad men (installation view) vinyl on coroplast, monitor, dimensions variable, 2018.